

## President's Message

Times change.

We're being heard now. The reasons are many - many of us who are working for change, and more and more others who have listened and joined in to help.

For a time, we were told that personal dignity and human rights, our reputations and acceptance in the community would only come after scientific validation. Gradually we are returning to a more honorable and traditional approach, where peoples good reputations and dignity are assumed until science proves otherwise.

Governments, doctors, and to some extent our own spokespersons had the cart before the horse. For while research helps explain and deal with problems, it must never be given more importance than human and social concerns.

Consider our history. It has not been the scientists and researchers who have brought progress on the issues relating to our needs as consumers. It has not been the academics, who deliberate interminably. It has been the people affected who have moved the issues forward.

Social Services fights, the first in our area by Jean Metcalfe of Smiths Falls, forced the Ontario government to rethink its policies on environmental sensitivity. Jean won the first Ontario disability assistance in 1983. The next year George Thomson's committee was appointed. People on welfare fought for subsidized housing and turned the Ministry of Housing around; now home owners get renovation grants. People who've had to fight to survive have improved the situation for everyone else.

More recently, bureaucrats and politicians have helped as well. Dr. Bruce Halliday, M.P., and Max Yalden, Chief Commissioner of the Canadian Human Rights Commission, acting on the basis of representations by people affected (not scientists or the medical profession) have been the two people most responsible for turning around Health and Welfare.

Nancy Lawand, of the Secretariat for Disabled Persons, has also been trying to help. She describes our problem in three parts - the medical cause, the resulting disabilities, and the environment that needs to be adapted. She has commented that we seem trapped in arguments about the first part, when it's really the second and third parts that we can do something about now.

Most important, the organization is coming of age. No longer dominated by care givers, the Allergy and Environmental Health Association is becoming a true consumers organization. No longer isolated and under seige, it has found the courage to include advocacy as a goal. No longer spurned, gradually we are being embraced by society.

If you had an issue you thought should be dealt with in the past, but were uncomfortable with the frustrations involved, its time to reconsider. People are not only listening, they're beginning to act.

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Chris Brown  
President - Ottawa Branch